United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Integrating Wildlife Habitat

2008 Farm Bill Conservation Programs

INTRODUCTION

For anyone who's ever watched a Great Blue Heron hunt or a herd of deer bound across an open field, it's easy to understand how the presence of wildlife enriches our lives. California landowners play an important role in providing the critical habitat upon which our state's diverse and magnificent wildlife depend.

Farmers and ranchers can easily integrate and enhance wildlife habitat in their operations. Grasslands, wetlands, riparian areas, hedgerows, and a variety of tree, shrub, forb and grass plantings can provide wildlife much-needed food and shelter. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers landowners both technical and financial assistance to increase wildlife habitat on their land.

CONSERVATION PLANNING

For more than 75 years, NRCS has placed a high priority on helping agricultural producers meet their environmental and economic goals through conservation planning. NRCS technical assistance and cost-share from voluntary 2008 Farm Bill conservation programs can help agricultural producers integrate wildlife habitat into their operations in a cost-effective manner.

NRCS conservationists work one-on-one with farmers and ranchers to come up with a conservation plan that provides scientifically sound alternatives for accomplishing their goals and a timeline for implementing conservation practices, including those for wildlife habitat. All information provided to NRCS for conservation planning purposes is strictly confidential.

A VARIETY OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES

There is a wide variety of conservation practices landowners can implement to enhance wildlife habitat on agricultural lands. Practices can be as simple as planting native grasses, forbs, shrubs or trees; fencing livestock out of a sensitive riparian area; planting a hedgerow to attract native pollinators; or enhancing a stock pond to attract wetland-dependent species. (See back for other specific examples of conservation practices.)

COST-SHARE FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT

Cost-share for wildlife habitat is available through several 2008 Farm Bill conservation programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

The California EQIP Wildlife Habitat/State Priority is offered to provide accelerated financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers who want to create, improve or enhance wildlife habitat on farms and ranches. California NRCS has established a separate statewide funding pool for the initiative. Farmers and ranchers in all California counties are eligible for the funding.

EQIP Wildlife contracts pay producers 50 to 75 percent of the estimated average cost of installing wildlife enhancement practices. Some producers may receive a larger cost-share percentage. Those who are considered historically under-served, have farmed or ranched less than 10 years (considered beginning farmers) or with limited financial resources (defined on a county by county basis) can receive 75 to 90 percent of the costs of conservation practices.

Interested producers are encouraged to contact their local NRCS office. Applications are accepted year-round. Eligible projects are periodically evaluated and prioritized for funding.






The Natural Resources Conservation Service Is An Equal Opportunity Employer & Provider

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

The California NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provides financial and technical assistance to eligible participants who want to create, improve or enhance wildlife habitat on the properties they own or manage. WHIP's primary purpose is to help participants develop habitat for upland, wetland, aquatic, and threatened and endangered species.

WHIP provides up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. WHIP cost-share agreements between NRCS and the participant generally last from two to ten years, depending on the time it takes to install and establish the conservation practices.

Interested producers are encouraged to contact their local NRCS office. Applications are accepted year-round. Eligible projects are periodically evaluated and prioritized for funding.

For more information on NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs, visit:
www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs

Conservation Practices Available

NRCS offers technical and financial assistance on a number of conservation practices that promote wildlife habitat on agricultural lands. Here are eight examples:

UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Simple changes in land use management can often help provide the needed habitat elements of food, cover, shelter and water. Where a change of management alone cannot provide these habitat factors in sufficient quantity, other practices may be needed.

HEDGEROW PLANTINGS

Establishing shrubs, trees and flowering plants provides food, cover and corridors for wildlife. With the appropriate mix of flowering plants, pollinators have access to needed pollen and nectar.

CONSERVATION COVER

Planting of trees, shrubs, flowering plants and grasses provides a diversity of food resources, cover and shelter that allows wildlife species to flourish across all land uses, such as cropland, rangeland and forestlands.

PRESCRIBED GRAZING

Through planned grazing, vegetation is managed to provide ample food, cover and shelter for wildlife species dependent on grassland, shrub land, woodland or riparian habitats.

FISH AND WILDLIFE STRUCTURES

Structures can provide sites for loafing, escape, nesting, rearing, roosting, perching or basking by terrestrial or aquatic species. Brush, stumps, rocks or artificial materials constructed in an appropriate design and location can meet a variety of habitat needs.

RIPARIAN FOREST BUFFER

Planting trees and shrubs creates shade to lower or maintain water temperature and provides a source of large woody debris and leaf litter that improves habitat for fish, aquatic organisms and riparian-dependent species.

ROAD/TRAIL/LANDING CLOSURE AND TREATMENT

Restoring land to native vegetation reduces habitat fragmentation by reconnecting wildlife habitat and migration routes, including streams and riparian areas. Restoration also helps to control noxious weeds and invasive species.

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